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Baylies, Francis

Some remarks on the
Life and Character of
General David Cobb.



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SOME REMARKS

ON THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

GENERAL DAVID COBB,

DELIVERED AT THE

TAUNTON LYCEUM,

JULY 2d, 1830.

By HON. FRANCIS BAYLIES.

FROM THE NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL REGISTER.



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GENERAL DAVID COBB.

To pronounce the eulogium of a man of worth, distinguished and honorable in public and private life, venerated by the people, and loved by his friends, is a work grateful to the heart—yet is also a task of infinite delicacy. If a portrait be presented in which a general resemblance is perceived—yet if it be caricatured into deformity, or embellished with beauties unknown to the original—all will discover a malignity of purpose, or a complimentary subserviency to the feelings of living friends, equally at war with truth.

The poet Southey wrote a beautiful life of Horatio Nelson. He presented his subject as a hero,—lofty, magnanimous, generous, humane, intrepid, disinterested and patriotic—yet he shaded the picture—and by relating truly, one horrible act of his life, the dazzling brightness of his splendid character was fearfully eclipsed. He laid open the terrible operation of the passions on a pure and noble heart, and for a moment exhibited the hero of the Nile as a tyrant and a ruffian,—yet for disclosing a solitary dereliction, for directing the eye to one dark spot in a blaze of light, Southey was thought more bold than prudent,—more honest than wise—but had he withheld the disclosure, he would have falsified history, and lost all just title to public confidence.

When it is the happy fortune of the writer to be able to present a politician without deceit, a statesman without ambition, a patriot without violence, and a warrior without ferocity—to exhibit the portraiture of genius by a description of its efforts and its excellencies, without being compelled to display the ravages of the passions—the unblemished page of such history, unstained with crime, will be unsullied with tears.

The distinguished man of whom I am about to speak was not free from faults, but his faults left no stings of remorse, their fruits brought into this world neither present woe, nor future misery.

* Hon. Francis Baylies, son of Hon. William Baylies, M. D., was born in Taunton, Oct. 16, 1783. Was Register of Probate, Chargé des Affaires to Buenos Ayres, and Member of Congress. He died Oct. 28, 1852, aged 69. He published in 1830, *An Historical Memoir of the Colony of New Plymouth*, in two volumes, octavo. See *Reg.* vii, 97; Emery's *Ministry of Taunton*, i, 252. In Williams's *American Medical Biography*, pp. 82-100, published in 1845, is a memoir of Hon. David Cobb, furnished by him, we presume, at a later date.—EDITOR.

Gen. David Cobb was born in this town* in the year 1748. His lineage was ancient and respectable. His ancestors were amongst our early settlers, and lived and died here.

In one of our early catalogues of proprietors and purchasers appears the name of John Cobb,* as early as 1656. One of his sons bore his name. He was married June 13, 1676, to Jane Woodward. One of his sons bore the name of Morgan, who married a Willis—he was the father of Thomas Cobb, a magistrate and legislator, born in 1705. Thomas Cobb was the father of the general. The mother of General Cobb was a Leonard, the daughter of James Leonard, and the granddaughter of James Leonard, for many years a representative of this town in the general court, who died in 1727. The last was the second son of James Leonard, the common ancestor of that family, who came to these parts in 1652.

It is easy to see how in the course of this descent he became connected by the ties of blood with the greater part of our inhabitants, and by what strong attachments he was bound to the spot which gave him birth, and which was also the residence, birth-place, home—and contained the graves of his kindred.

He was a favorite of his father, who designing him for a liberal education, placed him early in life at school. Master Marsh, a celebrated school master at Old Braintree (now Quincy) prepared him for the college, to which he was admitted in the summer of 1762, during the administration of President Holyoke, by whom he was particularly regarded, and highly estimated, both for talent and moral worth. His chum or room-mate during his college life was one who was afterwards a celebrated popular orator, the late Dr. Charles Jarvis. He was graduated in 1766. After leaving the university he commenced the study of medicine at Boston, under the instruction of Dr. Perkins, a celebrated physician of that day. An industrious student, and possessing a peculiar practical aptitude for several branches of the profession, when he left his instructor he was accomplished in his art; knowing in its ancient lore and its modern improvements. His excellent education, native sagacity, and quickness of mind enabled him in the outset of life to compete with those whose skill had been perfected by years of practice and long experience. His first essay was made at Boston under flattering circumstances, and with hopeful prospects of success.

Induced by the anxious wishes of his father, he abandoned the noble field for the successful prosecution of the healing art which Boston afforded, and returned to this county.

While pursuing the profession in our village, and in the surrounding country, the elements of the revolution began to move—ardent and enthusiastic, it was not for him to resist the workings of that mighty spirit which agitated a nation. He brought to the controversy the energies of youth, a deep knowledge of our political rights,

* Gen. Cobb was born at Attleborough, Sept. 14, 1748. See Williams's *Medical Biography*, p. 82, and Emery's *Ministry of Taunton*, i. 237. He was not a descendant of John Cobb as above stated, but of Austin or Augustine Cobb. John Cobb, of Taunton, who married Jane Woodward, is not known to have been related to Austin. This John was a son of Henry Cobb of Barnstable, as we learn from a genealogy of the Barnstable Cobbs, by Amos Otis, Esq., published in the *Barnstable Patriot*, Aug. 5 to Sept. 2, 1862. He had no son Morgan.—EDITOR.

and all the enthusiasm of one conscious of right, and struggling for liberty. He was placed in the very front rank of our patriotic citizens. Though young, the eyes of the people were already turned to him. He was one of those bold spirits who in a period of impending disasters and terrific perils, are called forth with their loudest voices to assume the place and the rank which in such days nought but the highest talent can assume, and which then will be confided to none except to such as can show the legitimate title. The bold-faced impudence of the demagogue then quails before the united force of talent and of virtue. The pretenders and impostors disappear—and presumption and ignorance are no longer found in the high places of society.

The general court which assembled in May, 1774, having been dissolved by General Gage, then the Royal Governor, another was summoned to meet in the October following, to which he was elected from this Town, as the colleague of Robert Treat Paine, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

It was not for him, however, to be satisfied with the passive support which could be given to a good cause by the mere services of a civilian. He sought for more active duties—he was impatient to share the perils and the glory of the camp, and when the opposition assumed the character of regular resistance on military principles, he assumed the sword, and entered the army in 1777, as lieutenant-colonel of a continental regiment, commanded by Col. Henry Jackson. In this regiment he encountered some hard service, particularly in New Jersey and on Rhode Island, where he led what may be called a forlorn hope, to delay with 20 men the progress of a Hessian regiment of cavalry.

His activity and talent, and high military qualities, attracted the attention of the commander-in-chief, whose peculiar excellence it was to judge rightly of the characters of men, and he was soon called to his family as his aid. There he remained until the termination of the war, although he was appointed to the chief command of the regiment in which he had entered the service, and left the army a full colonel and a brigadier-general by brevet.

He was with Washington during all his greater operations—and during many of the trying situations in which that great commander was placed. He was with him at the time of the treason of Arnold—the capture of Cornwallis—and when the army maddened by neglect, had resolved to turn their swords upon the congress, and redress their own wrongs.

The councils in which he assisted were no petty caballings for the miserable purposes of faction and of office. They were the deliberations of patriots and of heroes devising schemes to emancipate a nation, and rescue millions.

They fought no battles on paper—they issued no swelling manifestoes—they applied themselves to their mighty tasks with the wisdom of sages and the energies of demi-gods. Early in 1784, General Cobb returned to his home and resumed his profession. He had now seen life in all its varieties—in the city, in the country, and in the camp—in the highest circles of fashion, and in the obscurest recesses of poverty. He had been associated with the men of other countries—

the warriors of Frederick the Great whose lives had been passed beneath tents, and in marches, and battles, of the fiery-spirited Polanders still wearing the swords which they had aimed at the bosom of their king—but striving here to sink the odious character of assassins and regicides, and to take that of the champions of freedom. He was the associate too of many of those remarkable men who, in the early days of the French revolution were placed at its head.

He was not only the associate, but the intimate and confidential friend of Washington, Green, Lincoln, Knox and Hamilton.

By this extensive acquaintance with every variety of the human character, he had acquired a knowledge of motives, and an insight into the means by which men might be influenced—and he soon had occasion to call into use all the advantages of his experimental knowledge.

Soon after his return from the army, he had received from Governor Hancock an appointment to the bench of the court of common pleas, and was elected by the legislature to the office of major-general of the fifth division of the Massachusetts militia—thus uniting in his person the chief civil and military functions of the county.

A generation have arisen who know no other times than such as are peaceful, tranquil and happy. They look around them, they see fair and cultivated fields—the labors of the husbandman crowned with plenty—rewarded with competence. They hear in all directions the sounds of prosperous industry. The splendid mansions of the man of wealth rises in all its imposing grandeur, adorned with all the embellishments which wealth can bestow. The decorations of taste are brought home to the huts of poverty—the means of comfortable living are within the reach of all—want is driven from the poor man's door—all lie down at night with the consciousness of security, and rise with freshened hopes on the morrow, to commence another day of prosperous exertion.

I will now turn you back to other times, and other scenes.

The sacrifices made by this state during the war of the revolution were immense—personal property had disappeared—trade was unsettled—manufactures were not commenced—the sources of wealth were exhausted—the state debt was so great that the payment of the interest only, occasioned a serious embarrassment in the finances—the lands were deteriorating daily, as there was no market for surplusses, and of course no encouragement to cultivate—buildings were falling into decay from the want of means to repair them—the paper currency which had flooded the country had sunk to its intrinsic value, which was nothing, and there was no substitute. Private credit had nearly ceased, and there was little confidence between man and man. The public credit had sunk, and was rapidly sinking, and its total prostration was apprehended. The rich were unable and unwilling to lend; one class had already loaned to the extent of their means, and were pressing for payment, the other put their gold and their silver into their strong boxes and their iron chests, fearing the ravages of the tender laws. The interest of the public debt was accumulating, and there were no means of payment except by taxation, and no objects of taxation excepting the lands. Many were traversing the country with their rags fluttering in the winds,

squalid with want, reeking with filth, offending the senses, and shocking the feelings.

The state government well knew that any further delay in the payment of the interest of the debt would produce calamities, which they dreaded even to anticipate, and ultimately destroy the government. They made prodigious efforts to sustain the public credit; but taxation, heavy taxation, was their only resource. They were well aware that this measure would be productive of temporary distress; but as well did they know that if they did not adopt it, the escutcheon of the state, which had borne none but honorable emblems, would be stamped with bankruptcy and fraud, and that the edifice of government already loosened in its foundations, would tumble into ruins. In one year taxes were imposed to the amount of more than half the income and available means of the people. The canker of usury was already eating into the substance of the farmers, but a crisis had now arrived when the usurer closed his coffers, and refused to lend. The circulating money was not sufficient for the payment of the taxes—oxen, horses, cows and beds were seized by the collectors and sold at auction for a pittance. Creditors attached whatever the collector had spared. The court dockets bore interminable catalogues of delinquent names.

The deep and ominous sounds of discontent which at first were breathed in low murmurs, as the pressure increased, became louder, rose then to the tone of defiance, and at length the cries of rebellion in threats and imprecations, in screams and shouts, wild, discordant, and dreadful, rang through the astonished and horror stricken land—the clang of arms was heard—men rose to resist the laws, to besiege not hostile fortresses, but the very temples in which the laws were administered—to conquer not a public enemy—not invading armies—but to conquer—Great God—to conquer their own courts of justice.

The county court was to have been holden in the month of June, 1786. The suits already commenced, and about to be entered, if forced to judgment would cause the ruin of many; men wild with distress, ferocious with despair assembled in mobs. They were not armed it is true, but they breathed out the most horrible threats against the court, whose official existence they were determined to annihilate. Although the people of Massachusetts will bear much before they resort to violence, yet many were then ready for the last and worst extremities. The court bell began to sound, the mob began to rage; but to give some appearance of moderation to their proceedings they despatched a deputation to confer with the court. The mind of our warrior judge was fertile in resource; he had already devised a plan to save the law from violation, satisfy the people, and preserve peace. His plan was submitted to the court; they all concurred. He proposed to the deputation that the court should be opened, the actions entered that attachments might be preserved, and then should adjourn without entering the judgments. The deputation not being able to explain to the mob the result of their conference, a call was made for Judge Cobb. He instantly went amongst them, alone, and unarmed, and with that ready and clear elocution for which he was ever remarkable he explained the ar-

rangement and convinced them of its advantages and its propriety. They dispersed shouting his praises. The next Court was to be holden in September. No means had been opened for the relief of the people—their debts had increased, and their burthens were almost intolerable. The spirit of resistance was then marked with deeper ferocity, and the determination that the courts should not sit, appeared to be general amongst all malcontents of the state. Our departed friend was no temporizing statesman. He saw that a crisis had arrived, when the law must be supported by force, or yielded to anarchy. He was equal to that crisis. None felt a deeper pity for the distresses of the people—but when to obtain a temporary relief, they sought to overthrow the laws and the government, the tenderness of his character yielded to an imperious sense of duty, and he steeled his heart against the workings of a compassion fraught with woe to his country. He would not believe that armies involving treason against the commonwealth were the excesses of patriotic zeal; the destruction of social order a redress of grievances, or that rebellion and civil war were certain evidences of the true spirit of liberty.

He was determined to support the court and the laws even to the shedding of blood. The militia were ordered out. Court day arrived. The robe of the judge was thrown aside. The martial garb was resumed—again the plume waved over his head, and the sword of the warrior flashed bright in the sunbeams. Sounds ominous and threatening arose from the mob. The blood of the people, the blood of the people is to be shed, was the cry, to the onset—but when steady at their posts the citizen soldiers were seen—extended in double lines from the doors of the Court House—when the resolute demeanor of the commander was observed—the tone of defiance sank to that of remonstrance, and the general was entreated to withdraw his soldiers. “Away with your whining, was his determined and memorable reply. I will hold this court, if I hold it in blood. I will sit as a Judge, or I will die as a General.” In an instant all was quieted—the mob stole off secretly and silently, and the laws triumphed. But the spirit was not yet quelled, the session of the supreme court was to follow in October. All the western counties were in rebellion, and the rebels were in arms. The spirit extended here. The insurgents rallied their whole force, armed themselves and appeared in battle array on yonder Green, with the avowed intention of preventing the sitting of the court by force—the disaffection had spread wide and far, and in this whole county, with the exception of one town, not one entire company could be rallied to the defense of the government—but these were no times for intimidation. Now look back to that scene. Some of you can remember it—aye remember it as you remember the dark day of 1780. It was nearly forty-four years since. On one side of this village was posted a large body of armed insurgents—on the other the supporters of government, the defenders of the laws. The cannon were planted—the matches were lighted and waving. The orders were peremptory that the court should sit—and there was every probability that they could not sit without a battle. Had the government selected for their commander one who was either rash or timid, our peaceful village

might have witnessed transactions equal in atrocity to the most horrible of the French revolution. The responsibility of the commander was great, but unconscious of wrong, he felt no fear. He drew a line with his sword on the ground—he said to the rebel leader, “pass that line and I fire, the blood be upon your own head.” Again the laws triumphed—the line was not passed and the court sat in peace. In the night the insurgents dispersed, and from that day to this, in this county, not an arm has been raised to resist the civil authority.

To these heroic men this state owes an everlasting debt of gratitude. Entrusted with the military power of the commonwealth, they preserved the peace and the laws, the liberties and the lives of the people. Never were men invested with such powers, who performed their work with more intrepidity, or with less severity. Danger they laughed to scorn, and yet the sight of distress would melt either of them to tears. Like the war-horse of the scriptures, they thundered over the fields of battle and of blood, yet they fled even from the sight of the merited punishment of their own soldiers for offences against discipline. In war like the eagle they snuffed the carnage; in peace the temper of the infant dove was not more gentle. There was no mixture of ruffian and hero in their hearts—like the knights of chivalry their blows were for giants, their tenderness for weakness, womanhood and infancy. Their names were Lincoln, Brooks, and Cobb, three of the major-generals of Massachusetts. Long, long will our people have reason to bless their memories—their mingled system of energy and gentleness quelled a wide-spread and dangerous rebellion, and left no stain of blood behind. Why should they have exposed themselves to the perils and the toils of a civil war in defense of the rights of property? Like the other heroes of the revolution their gains in that service had been poverty and suffering and wounds and fears. Had the rebels succeeded and established an Agrarian law, they would have been the gainers. Two of them (B. and C.) led harder lives to earn a bare subsistence than the day laborer who lies down at night, and enjoys the common blessings of man. The other involved in responsibilities for a companion in arms, dragged his halting limbs, maimed and mutilated in the battles of his country, to the doors of a prison. The sight of the venerable prisoner bending under the weight of years, his head whitened in his country's service, yet bearing the laurels of many fields of glory, softened even the obduracy of men, who could place a general of the Revolution in the hands of a sheriff, to extort from the compassion of friends the amount of their debts. Shame flushed their cheeks—the hero was released, and in time the debts were honorably paid.

Poor as these men were, the considerations of gain or loss, of popularity or unpopularity never entered into their views. They had duties to perform and that was enough. They would have performed them, they would have defended the courts, had their names been borne as dependent debtors on half its entries and had its judgments and executions left them to pauperism and beggary.

They are now beyond the reach of envy, and calumny can no longer riot on their characters.

General Cobb, in May, 1789, was elected the sole representative of this town to the general court, and was instantly elevated to the

speaker's chair, which honorable office he sustained until the termination of the session which commenced in January, 1793, having served four years as the representative of the town and as speaker of the house. He left the chair in consequence of having been elected by the people of the whole state, according to a peculiar mode of choice then prevailing, a member of the third Congress, and took his seat in that body at the commencement of the second term of Washington's administration, and was associated in legislative labors with Ames, Dexter, King, Madison, and Giles, and many other statesmen of renown. He left congress in March, 1795, and in the following year removed with his family to a remote part of Maine. He now disappeared from public life, and devoted himself to agriculture—the cultivation and improvement of his farm. For this pursuit he cherished an inclination akin to enthusiasm, and nothing more delighted his heart, than a neat and thrifty cultivation of the land.

He was destined, however, to run almost the same career in public life as that through which he had already passed, and to hold the same stations when an inhabitant of either extremity of the state. In 1802 he appeared as a senator from the Eastern District of Maine and was immediately elected president of the senate. In 1808 he was elected to the council, and in 1809 became the second magistrate of the state, by accepting the office of lieutenant-governor. After a short intermission he was restored to councils of the state, and during the war of 1812 was one of the board of military defence. While a resident of Maine he was appointed chief justice of the court of common pleas, for the county of Hancock, and major-general of the 10th division of the state militia. In a few years after the termination of the war (1815) he retired from public life, and after a short residence in Maine, he returned to his natal spot, to end his days.

Such is the narrative of the long career in public life and office of General David Cobb. He was perhaps the most distinguished of our citizens. Aside from the gratitude which is his due as a great public benefactor he is specially entitled to ours. If we were sometimes vexed by the tartness of his reproofs for our want of public spirit, yet candor must admit that his rebukes were intended for good, and that he had given the strongest evidences of his attachment to our welfare. He was the parent of our flourishing academy and through his influence and that alone, was that magnificent donation obtained from the state, which now supports it. He devised the plan of a fund for the support of the ministry, and to him mainly is the First Congregational Society indebted for its present ample means. Whenever any public good was to be effected, whether in founding institutions for the support of education, the advancement of morals, the purposes of charity, or the honor of the public, he was active and efficient, giving all his services, and contributing from his own resources to the full extent of his means. As a physician he was sagacious, learned and eminently successful. His presence brought comfort to the bed of the sick, the alleviations of art, the soothing of humanity, the words of solace and hope. As a soldier he was fearless and intrepid, calm and collected in danger, rapid and decisive in judgment, and prompt in execution.

To the courts he brought a competent knowledge of the law. Although he was not a lawyer, his clear perceptions and strong sense enabled him to detect sophistry, and to remove the impediments with which artifice and legal ingenuity, too often contrive to embarrass the progress of justice.

As a politician he was distinguished for his love of order, and his attachment to the constitution. He was never turned aside from an honorable course by any considerations of interest or popularity. He met all questions with an intrepid heart. He looked to the great and permanent interests of his country and to those interests he devoted himself with all his heart and all his soul.

As the presiding officer of a public body he was unrivalled. Graceful and dignified in his deportment, quick to perceive and clear to explain, he dispatched the public business with ease and facility, and won by his impartial performance of the duties of the chair, even the confidence and the praises of his adversaries.

He was the friend of genius wherever he found it, no matter in what association, no matter in what party. His eagle eye could discover the concealed Ulysses even before he had bent the bow, and when he doffed his rags, and blazed out like a God. The triumphant smile of the speaker announced the overthrow of dullness and the victory of intellect.

It is generally the calamity of age, as time paralyzes the strength and tames the passions, and contemporaries one by one drop away, to disregard the social comforts and enjoyments, to depreciate the times in which they live, by constantly forming injurious and querulous comparisons with those which are past, drawing their solitary draughts of pleasure from the fountains of recollection, lingering in the world with gloomy reluctance, like strangers in a country to whose usages they are not accustomed, and with whose inhabitants they are not familiar.

Not so with our friend, he never lingered in the race of life—he kept ever with the times. Instead of confining his associations to the narrow circle of his contemporaries—he went into the great world and extracted all its comforts—he used the true philosophy of life and multiplied his pleasures by taking a lively interest in the pleasures and in the happiness of his friends and neighbors. He rejoiced in their prosperity—he never felt that miserable and rancorous envy which seems to make some men believe that such thrift is at their expense. He had no narrow views. He delighted to watch the progress of those improvements in science and in the arts, and to witness their practical application to the purposes of life, by which the conveniences and comforts of man are increased. This disposition often led him into the society of the young and of those in active life. He even went further, he drank of the stream of harmless pleasure from its uppermost fountain, and participated in the anticipations of pleasure, the keen perception of the joys of life which none but children feel, when excited by novelty they call up their puny powers to grasp new objects of knowledge; he answered their eager enquiries with kindness, and called forth for their delight those blandishments of manner which seldom failed to win, whenever he condescended to apply them. Upon the whole he was a patriot

without ambition, a philanthropist without vanity, a statesman without selfishness. The steady friend of order, morals, and education, destitute of all sickly sensibility; his heart was tender, making no professions of patriotism, he would have laid down his life for his country. He was too proud to flatter, and too honest to deceive.

With the delight of a mind in the spring tide of youth, with all its buoyancy, with all its vivacity, he read the wonderful productions of modern genius—those new and miraculous creations of fancy which have revived in this business age—the empire of romance over the human heart.

There are some who acquire much reputation for wisdom by assuming a grave aspect and dealing out from their scanty store, little dribblets of knowledge—magnifying trifles—imposing upon the vulgar by a pedantic parade of truisms and nothings—like the bird of Minerva looking wise, but hurting naught but little mice. He disdained all this quackery, this mockery of true wisdom. His was a mind which poured forth a constant stream of knowledge. There was no parade, no affectation of learning in him. He threw off from the superabundance of his mental riches, maxims which might have instructed sages and statesmen, and thoughts which sparkled and blazed and burned with all the fire of a poet, reaching his conclusions by a luminous path, and showing his whole course by flashes of eloquent demonstration.

His manners and disposition were such that he was equally the delight of the commanding general and the humble private. Whenever he appeared at the social board, his wit and humor—his fund of anecdote and power of pleasing, gave a zest to the intercourse and a blander character to the feasts of heroes—and well did he know

“The art
To win the soldier’s hardy heart.”

Associated as a member of the family of Washington with the polished courteous warriors of France—the high bred cavaliers of Rochambeau’s army, he well maintained the character of the country whose arms he bore, and they soon found that it was not climate, or country, or courts, which fashioned the gentleman. With him conversation never degenerated into dull prosing or tedious narrative. He never imposed on his company his own topics, but seizing theirs, he discovered such facility of illustration, such a glowing imagination—such a vivacious and almost poetical flow of language, and such varied and universal knowledge that if he failed to convince—he never failed to charm. This talent remained to the last, it shone out in the evening of his life, like the last flashes of the thunder cloud, frequently the brightest.

Anacreon might with more than poetical propriety have addressed his celebrated apostrophe to him,

“Now I love the mellow sage,
Smiling through the veil of age,
And whene’er the man of years
In the dance of joy appears,
Age is on his temples hung,
But his heart—his heart is young.”

There are some other considerations connected with his life, character, and actions, growing more particularly out of his great age, and the wonderful events which he had witnessed, deserving, as I think, of some notice. He was a venerable monument of ancient times and ancient manners. He did not seem like one cut off from the living generation. He stood amongst us, it is true, as the man of other ages, but yet he was one of us. His sympathies were in common with ours, yet he connected us with the days of old, the men of other times, and familiarized to our apprehensions events which now come like the shadows of the dead upon the imaginations of the living. He looked back on the train of wonderful events which he had witnessed with the wisdom of a philosopher, but with the feelings of a man. Age had neither chilled his blood, nor frozen his heart. I have said that he was a favorite scholar of President Holyoke; this association carries us back to the first settlement of the country—for the president had arrived at adolescence before the death of the first born of New England. When he began to comprehend, the legends of antiquity came fresh and glowing from those who not only received them from the holy seers of New England, but who saw the wonders themselves, who could tell him of the Endicotts, the Winthrops and the Dudleys, those iron-nerved pilgrims who built up the church of Christ and the temple of liberty in the American wilderness; of the mystic eloquence of Vane, Sir Henry, of Leverett who fought by the side of Oliver Cromwell; of those terrible men who sat in judgment on their king, and doomed to the axe the head which had worn a crown; of that romantic war, the exploits of Church, and the desolations of Philip, where men fought for the existence of the English race.

But the president himself saw many marvellous things and knew many wonderful men. He heard with his own ears the fiery and impassioned eloquence of the Cookes, father and son, who for fifty years wielded the fierce democracy of Massachusetts, and in the royal presence itself, questioned the mandates of royalty. He saw his countrymen arrayed in arms and on the march to achieve that magnificent enterprise, which has shed such glory on our provincial history. But let us examine what our friend himself has known and seen. He knew the talented, eccentric and unfortunate Shirley, once the pride of Massachusetts. He heard the wail mingling with the shout which announced the victory, and the fall of Wolfe. He saw the commencement and the termination, and he was an actor, and an important one too, in that tremendous conflict which gained an empire to the world, and lost it to the British crown. He heard the first and the last trumpet blasts which issued from the lips of James Otis. He saw the budding and the blasting of that mighty mind which shook a throne and reared a republic.

For more than four years he stood by the side of George Washington on the battle-field, and in the tent he shared his councils—he heard the sound of his voice, he felt the pressure of his hand, grasping his own in the spirit of friendship. He witnessed the rise and fall of states and empires.

He witnessed the overthrow of thrones and of races of kings

which had endured for a thousand years, and he lived to witness their wonderful restoration.

He saw the rise, the progress and the fall of the master spirit of the age, the modern Alexander, who bore the republican banner of France and his own imperial eagles from Egypt to Moscow; whose ambition encompassed the ends of the earth, and grasped the world.

He saw the first action of our national constitution; and he assisted in framing the organic laws on which depend the prosperity and the grandeur of the nation. He saw our manufactures confined to forges and smithy. He lived to see with his own eyes the existence of a power and capacity in this, to rival nations whose experimental knowledge has been the growth of centuries.

Our commerce, in his youth confined to miserable river craft, creeping along the shores and gathering the scanty articles of traffic from a poverty-stricken country, he lived to see encompassing the world and condensing its wealth; a navy formed under his own eye, before which the crescent of Mahomet has waned — before which the tri-colored flag of France has been struck — before which the pride of the queen of the ocean has been humbled.

He lived to see the population of his country swelled from one million to twelve; and to see this population surmount the barrier of the Alleghany, sweep down the magnificent rivers of the west, pass the mighty Mississippi, the father of the waters, and advancing with certain and rapid steps to plant the banner of the republic on the shores of the Pacific.

This view could be expanded into a volume; but I am compelled to forbear. It is enough to wonder at the past. In anticipating the future, imagination itself is bewildered, astonished and paralyzed.

I come now to the closing scene, when that bold spirit which had borne its full part in the great events of the last sixty years was about to take its flight; when that hardy frame which had braved the blasts of the winter, the burning sun of the summer, the night storm, and the battlefield; which had found its resting place on a rock, with a snow bank for a pillow, was extended, weak, prostrate and helpless, on the bed of death. Then when the hand of fate was upon him, when that dark curtain which separates the living from the dead, which, like the curtain that enveloped the sacred spot of the temple, and concealed from the eyes of mortals the things consecrated to God, was about to fall, he called back to his mind the thoughts, the feelings of his youth — his early recollections — his early associations.

“Et dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos.”

The home of his heart was here, and here he chose his grave.

When he was laid in that quiet place “where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest,” the glorious sun was sinking beneath the western horizon, and the shades of evening were about to fall. No banner waved over his humble grave; no martial dirge sent forth its mingled strains of wail and triumph; no thunder from the cannon announced the fall of a hero. He well knew the heartlessness of public exhibitions of sorrow, and refused to have his grave profaned with “the mockery of woe.”

When his kindred had departed, one stood at his grave who loved him well; and as he saw the first earth thrown upon his coffin, he asked himself this question — Is this the end? Will nothing remain of that bright spirit, which once animated that lifeless body, but the dust, soon to be mingled with that which covers it? Can it be possible that those lofty aspirations which grasped at a higher world, by seeking the good of man in this, — those deep philosophic contemplations on the nature of intellect — those profound moral maxims, bearing the impress of a genius which, in its contemplations, soared above the earth — those bright imaginations, almost breathing of the inspirations of prophecy — that divine flame, pervading the bosom of the philanthropist, kindling the fancy of the poet, warming the heart of the hero, seeming to come fresh from a fountain, whose waters having been “troubled by an angel,” were mingled with fire, and flashing with beams of living light, can be nothing but modifications of vile matter, the work, the action of a machine of clay, perishable and mortal! No; let the atheist—let the man without a God, console himself with such belief, I will believe that the thinking mind is a spark from Heaven, changeless and immortal. I will believe that there is a stream of light issuing from the grave, penetrating the darkness, and mingling with that ocean of light—that light that never yields to darkness—that light that eternally surrounds the throne of God. I will believe that my venerable friend exists—exists in happiness, that his sins are forgiven, “for he loved much”—that in the house of our common Father, “where there are many mansions,” there is one at least for him.

General Cobb was born Sept., 1748. Died April 17, 1830.

Philosophy looking. + part





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